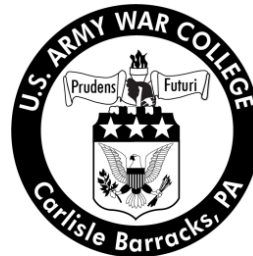


Civilian Research Project USAWC Fellow

After 2014: The U.S./NATO Missions in Afghanistan

by

Colonel J.B. Vowell
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

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President Obama has formally announced the end of combat operations by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the end of 2014, and directed ISAF to focus operations until that time on Security Force Assistance (SFA) to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The question becomes what strategy, support, missions and troop requirements will be necessary to keep the gains made in Afghanistan once ISAF withdraws. This paper will evaluate the best way forward to achieve our stated U.S. vital national security interest in the region to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda. By researching the effectiveness of our experiences in Afghanistan, this study will assess the enabling conditions for future success. Focused counterterrorism (CT) efforts from within Afghanistan, continued SFA missions to develop the ANSF, and the provision of coalition enablers to mitigate operational risk will best support our stated U.S. vital national security interest while simultaneously defeating al-Qaeda's strategy.

After 2014: The U.S./NATO Missions in Afghanistan

In May of 2012, President Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed an Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement that outlined common goals for Afghanistan and security in the region through 2024.¹ At the NATO Summit in Chicago that same month, President Obama formally announced an end to combat operations by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and a transition to Security Force Assistance (SFA) operations in support of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by 2014.² In his State of the Union Address in February, 2013, President Obama reiterated the ending of combat missions for the U.S. and that after 2014, missions would remain to include “training, advising, and equipping” the ANSF.³ The U.S. support to ISAF’s combat mission will therefore end in December, 2014. The question becomes what strategy, support, missions and troop requirements will be necessary to keep the gains made in Afghanistan once ISAF withdraws.

In this paper I will recommend the best way forward to achieve our stated U.S. vital national security interest in the region to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda (AQ). Drawing upon our decade of U.S. experiences and missions in Afghanistan, I will apply relevant evaluation criteria for any future mission and with a discussion of key conditions needed for success. I will show that a balanced approach of missions, including basing focused counterterrorism (CT) efforts from within Afghanistan, continued SFA missions to develop the ANSF, and the provision of coalition enablers to mitigate operational and theater risk will best support our stated U.S. vital national security interest while simultaneously defeating al-Qaeda’s strategy in the region.

Where We Are Today

The current ISAF mission that supports *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan has shifted from a comprehensive counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy to one of Security Force Assistance (SFA). Dr. Joseph Collins at the National Defense University terms this “Afghanization”, implying ownership of security by Afghans.⁴ This focus away from the previous COIN strategy and associated surge of forces in Afghanistan, where the population’s security was our collective focus and on developing the ANSF to provide their own security is now the glide slope for withdrawal. Said another way, as they stand up, we will stand down. But is this effort in SFA enough to ensure that our stated vital national interests in the region can be achieved in the time remaining?

The National Security Strategy of the United States, last published in May, 2010 describes the U.S. vital national interest is “to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda and its violent affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan and around the world.”⁵ In addition, President Obama has stated goals for Afghanistan that include the “development of a stable and secure Afghanistan from ever becoming a safe haven for terrorists that threaten Afghanistan, the region, and the world.”⁶ Therefore, any discussion of mission sets and forces required beyond 2014 should always be balanced against these stated strategic aims. To determine what course of action to adopt by the U.S. after the ISAF’s mission comes to a close, we must be relatively certain that al-Qaeda (AQ) and other associated movements are unable to conduct operations with a strategic effect and that they cannot find the required purchase needed to do so in Afghanistan. This means the

Afghan state must have sufficient legitimacy and security forces to secure themselves and provide for overall stability.

The development of competent ANSF through security force assistance is one essential requirement to achieve this end. A stable environment would flow from the development of effective host nation security forces. The continued CT effort against transnational terrorist groups and leadership is another key facet that meets our strategic aims. Ongoing CT operations continue to target the networks of the highest level transnational terrorists while SFA simultaneously focuses upon the broad military effort in training, advising, and assisting the ANSF to become operational and self-sustaining. The underlying assumption of current efforts is that ANSF will provide for their own security and prevent the overthrow of the elected government in Kabul and a return to a Taliban state by 2014. CT operations will have assisted by neutralizing AQ and associated movements, leaving Afghan Taliban isolated as a result. For the current strategy to be successful, the ANSF capability and capacity must be effective enough to provide internal security and thus prevent Taliban resurgence by the end of 2014. With this timeline as the backdrop, the outcome of this coalition effort is anything but certain given the time left.

At this point I will briefly introduce several military options that will continue to secure vital U.S. national interests in Afghanistan after 2014 when the ISAF mission ends. One possible option for NATO and the U.S. is an almost complete withdrawal of all forces after 2014; the “Zero Option”, which is similar to the complete withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. A second option is to continue the current focus of security force assistance that will almost certainly be necessary to continue ANSF development after

2014 in concert with ongoing CT operations. A third option is to focus solely upon counterterrorism (CT) operations, which would specifically target AQ leadership and capabilities. Last, a continued but focused counterinsurgency mission in only the largely populated areas of the Pashtun Belt is an option that continues to focus on separating the Taliban movement from the people in whom they find support. I will analyze each of these options in detail later and make a recommendation for the best plan to enact after 2014 when the ISAF mission ends.

To frame the discussion, I will discuss various challenges and the problem sets that regard Afghanistan that will remain factors after 2014 to progress in security, development and governance. I will describe al-Qaeda's strategy and why the Afghanistan/Pakistan region is vital to support their goals. I will evaluate valuable lessons, both favorable and unfavorable, from our recent experiences in Afghanistan that point our future strategy in a better direction. Using the post-Soviet experience as a guide, I will show where relevant lessons in security development and governance support can be successful in Afghanistan. As a result, I will also discuss key enabling conditions that must be addressed for any future mission success in Afghanistan. These include positive engagement and support of Pakistan, the international community's continued economic support of GIRoA, Afghanistan Presidential elections support, and reconciliation efforts with Taliban leadership. These enabling conditions are drivers to security and stability that also prevent a reemergence of AQ from this important region.

Afghanistan and the Operational Environment: Always Fighting Uphill

Afghanistan has some unique challenges with respect to governance and security due to dynamics of the human terrain. Developmental and demographic statistics bear this out. The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measurement that accounts for life expectancy, literacy, and standard of living. Afghanistan currently ranks a very poor 172d on the list of all countries.⁷ The literacy rate across the country, which affects any future stability and prosperity, hovers at 40% for males; 12% for females.⁸ In addition, the people in Afghanistan have been at war, not just sporadic conflict, beginning December 25th, 1979, when the Soviet 40th Army invaded the country. This has had a considerable effect upon the psychology of the population and created a society that is more one of survivorship than one that is interconnected with a national identity. What little infrastructure in roads, bridges, power generation and civil society Afghanistan had was severely degraded under Soviet occupation and never totally rebuilt.⁹ This included agricultural development, where in the 1970's, Afghanistan actually used to export many food crops where today, the country is a debtor nation to agriculture, with the exception of opium. Illicit trade underpins the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the country, where an estimated \$2.6 billion each year is in the illegal drug trade alone.¹⁰

Corruption is endemic and patronage across the political spectrum is how the government and its leadership extend its reach and maintains bases of power. In 2012, according to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), half of the population paid bribes to public officials at an average cost of \$270 per person for an estimated \$3.9 billion paid in bribes to Afghan public servants of every sector.¹¹ These data show that

there are significant challenges to the development of Afghan civil society and legitimacy of government. These data also show some of the reasons why the Taliban were able to rise rather quickly in the mid-1990's to rule most of the country and continue to serve as underlying recruiting tools for Taliban and other organizations. For example, there are many instances of Taliban resolving land disputes quickly and fairly in rural areas where subsistence farmers could not only afford bribing local judges, they cannot get the case on the docket in any time frame to hear the case.¹² With these and many other data, we see that Afghan society and the country as a whole is fractured, without significant prospect for national wealth development. As a result, the human landscape has been and continues to be highly susceptible to extremist ideology. Given this small sample of critical data and indicators it is easy to understand why operations in Afghanistan have been very difficult to this point and will most likely remain challenging in the future. As Ambassador Ryan Crocker has said, "Everything is hard and it's hard all the time".¹³

The Strategy of al-Qaeda: Why al-Qaeda Wants Khoresan

As our stated vital U.S. interest involves the defeat of al-Qaeda, it is instructive to evaluate the stated strategy of al-Qaeda as a reflection of how the U.S. strategy against it has been written for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region in particular. President Obama has repeatedly stated that al-Qaeda is on the decline in the borderlands and that we are achieving our goals in Afghanistan with respect to al-Qaeda.¹⁴ Others have described that al-Qaeda franchises and associated movements elsewhere should draw more of our attention away from Afghanistan-Pakistan in the coming years, arguing for reducing our presence in Afghanistan as a result of waning al-Qaeda presence in that region.¹⁵

Both situations seem correct at face value but neither describes the whole situation. We must be careful not to ignore history and the power of extreme ideology underpinning the reasons al-Qaeda wants to remain viable in Afghanistan.

AQ's overarching goal remains the return of the Caliphate and Sharia law over all of the lands associated in history as belonging to the Muslims.¹⁶ This requires fighting the "near enemy" of those nations and governments considered apostasy to AQ's interpretation of Islam, such as Saudi Arabia, and the "far enemy", the United States and western countries who back Middle East autocratic states and are therefore perceived to be the root cause of Muslim suffering.¹⁷ To affect their strategy, even an amorphous organization like AQ needs a base of operations to fight the near and far enemy. To achieve the return to strict adherence of Sharia and the history of Islamic conquest in the region, AQ was drawn to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region for both practical and religious reasons. This area is known as Khoresan (Persian for "land of the sunrise") and has many connotations for AQ's extremist ideology.

Over time, Khoresan has been part of the Persian, Mongol, and Mughal empires and its borders have shifted throughout modern day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and some central Asian states.¹⁸ Specifically, leaders and members of al-Qaeda are inspired by the End of Time prophecies in the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammed. These foretell that one day a great Islamic power would rise in the east (Khoresan) with the return of the Mahdi (chosen one), attacking under black banners, destroying the enemies of Islam without pause until conquering Jerusalem. This is the prophecy of Greater Khoresan.¹⁹ It is equally important to understand that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri both fled to this area after working in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and

Sudan in order to unite and formalize their organization on the land religiously connected to their goal of a return of the Islamic Caliphate.²⁰ Further, it is no coincidence al-Qaeda adopted the black flag as a direct symbol of their legitimacy to the providential army of the black banners from Khoresan that would lead the Ummah and Caliphate to successful conquest of nations.²¹

More recently, the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan was the birthplace of the successful modern Jihad against the Soviets. Warriors of this 1980's Jihad, including the leadership of the Taliban and AQ, have significant influence in the current jihadist landscape because they continue to base their organizations and fight from this region. Fighters of the Soviet Jihad are seen to carry significantly more weight than fighters who fought only in Chechnya or Bosnia later on. Khoresan has a tremendous propaganda impact for al-Qaeda: more so than any fight in the Horn of Africa, Yemen or Mali today. To AQ and its followers, the region inspires the spiritual calling of jihad.²²

The symbolism of the region is as important now as it was in 1980. Khoresan is "the base of The Base (al-Qaeda)" and as such, the physical Center of Gravity for al-Qaeda's strategy to create a global Islamic caliphate. We can see through the lens of history and context of religion that there is great desire by AQ to continue the global jihad from the border region and Afghanistan in particular. AQ sees this as the fulfillment of Mohammed's prophecy of Khoresan. Al-Qaeda thus views the franchises in the Middle East and North Africa as compelling support elements to the greater cause but in and of themselves not decisive.²³

Mali, Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Chechnya, Yemen, Syria and other places have had or are developing significant franchise terrorist groups associated with al-Qaeda, who

are each bent on jihad in their specific region. In Mali, for example, the main al-Qaeda affiliate is essentially a Toureg-led side of an ongoing civil war that won't manifest itself as a global terror organization.²⁴ But the decisive operation for AQ and pivotal to their cause is centered on the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Everything else is a shaping effort to the essential need to control Khorasan. In point of fact, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's co-founder and now de facto leader after the death of Osama bin Laden, continues to release statements from the region supporting the actions and efforts of franchise groups in other countries, particularly those involved in the Arab Spring and overthrow of autocratic Arab governments.²⁵

In practical terms, the AF-Pak border area is rugged, remote, austere, but close enough to Peshawar, Quetta and lines of communication to project their assaults globally as has happened in the past.²⁶ An unstable and ungoverned Afghanistan and Pakistan give AQ and associated movements the chaos they need to grow. A very compliant and agreeable population in the borderlands likewise will remain an enduring attractive condition the area gives AQ.²⁷ The leadership of AQ certainly has desired to remain out of the reach and eyes of western powers they are fighting. This is certainly supported by remaining based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. It is much harder for AQ to escape prosecution in countries close enough to the Mediterranean, Red Sea, or the Persian Gulf. For one reason, many governments in these areas have had years of practical work policing jihadist movements. In addition, western forces are better postured in these areas to strike within operational reach from over the shore capabilities that can reach AQ elements. International military operations against AQ is more readily achieved from the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, or the Red Sea than

gives western forces operational reach to AQ affiliates in the Middle East and North Africa. This, of course, is not as readily achievable in eastern Afghanistan or in the FATA of Pakistan. It was very problematic for the U.S. to strike against the Taliban leadership and AQ after the attacks of 9/11 as there were no bases and no rapid means to introduce ISR or combat power and troops into Afghanistan. The initial operations against the Taliban and AQ in October, 2001 were conducted by a very small footprint of CIA paramilitary forces as DoD assets were not positioned to respond.²⁸

These are the very practical reasons al-Qaeda leadership chose to continue basing from this region as their main effort. In complement with their ideological underpinnings, AQ will try to retain their strategic HQ in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan for the indefinite future. As a result, the pressure against AQ here in support of our NSS is essential and efforts to concentrate forces and targeting to achieve this will result in greater outcomes. Therefore, defeat of AQ in Khoresan defies their religious underpinning and strategy in multiple ways. Defeat here would most likely fracture franchise organizations in the region and abroad as the home base of AQ and the movement is dismantled. In military terms, concentrating on attacking AQ in their strategic center of gravity in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region more directly achieves the long-term goals to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat the main effort of the organization. Strategically, this means remaining engaged against AQ in this important region and ensure the organization or subsequent affiliates cannot strategically reemerge.

From an enemy course of action standpoint, AQ would desire nothing more than to have an unstable, chaotic Afghanistan under Taliban rule yet again. AQ would

further like an unstable Pakistan where their ideology continues to gain traction from a disaffected youth population whose governments, either military or civilian, have been ineffective in their own right. It is a central reason behind their decision to throw weight and support to regional-focused terrorist groups such as the Haqqani Network (HQN) or Terek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). If U.S. and western forces were to depart the region, AQ would have tremendous credibility in the region and the greater Islamic world as a result. They would be seen as winners, very much like the Mujahedeen were against the Soviets. This would serve their recruiting and funding interests, particularly monies from the Sunni Arab Gulf region. Having this environment would be the precondition for basing their planning, preparations, training and exportation of catastrophic violence overseas to the Far Enemy. If the U.S. fails to continue offense operations against AQ in their bases in the region, and GIRoA succumbs to even a partial Afghan Taliban return, AQ could reemerge a more viable threat though it may take more time for AQ to be truly strategic again. The Afghanistan/Pakistan border region may well be an area of permanent crisis if the broader root causes of extremist violence are never addressed as well.

Al-Qaeda Unabated

There are several dangerous courses of action the U.S. and the region could face with AQ's strategy. One suggestion is that if AQ or associated movements in the region were to control nuclear materials from an unstable Pakistan, it may be possible to create a truly catastrophic event in a major western metropolitan area with significant consequences.²⁹ AQ has been on record in their desire for obtaining weapons of mass destruction, but currently lack any technical capability to obtain or utilize such devices.

By remaining engaged in the region, the U.S. maintains a strategic early warning ability. This helps to ensure that al-Qaeda's intent never matches this horrific capability.

Toward a More Stable Environment—Lessons Learned

The ISAF campaign strategy in the past few years along security, development, and governance lines of effort has largely been about the establishment of a stable environment within Afghanistan so that transition is possible. In theory, a stable Afghanistan should prevent the chaotic and insecure conditions, similar to those found in the 1990's, that would allow a reemergence of the Taliban and the basing of al-Qaeda. So far, COIN has been the vehicle, or the ways and means, of that aim. The ISAF focus on counterinsurgency operations across Afghanistan has yielded important, positive results in the overall important goal of creating a stable Afghanistan.

NATO's focus in Afghanistan after 2002 has been on broad counterinsurgency missions at the tactical and operational level, while national governance and security sector development have been the focus at the strategic level.³⁰ The ISAF mission of counterinsurgency has mostly culminated with the recovery of surge forces of 2009-2012 that President Obama's provided for the COIN effort. The component of security force assistance (SFA), a mission that was conducted primarily by Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) since 2002, is now the mission for NATO.³¹ Part of this mission is the deliberate NATO planning effort to create sufficient Afghan Army and Police forces, currently at 182,000 and 150,000, respectively and thus to transition the missions of security now that host nation forces have been generated to do so.³² It is also a political acknowledgement that over 60% of U.S. citizens believe we should end our combat mission in Afghanistan and come home.³³ Last, the dollar costs,

with over \$118 billion in 2012 alone, have become cost-prohibitive to continue in an era of fiscal austerity due to budget realities at home in the U.S. and most NATO countries.³⁴

What Worked So Far—Protecting the People

Of prime importance, the focus of counterinsurgency to secure the population first has prevented insurgent groups from gaining territories or purchase of any significance in the country.³⁵ The places that are “Taliban territory” or potential al-Qaeda safe havens are deeply rural and in mostly mountainous and sparsely populated areas of the country. While certain villages and areas are under control of Taliban elements, no major city in Afghanistan has ever been reoccupied by Taliban forces, AQ or other insurgent groups since 2001. The capability of the Taliban currently does not match their intent with their desire to do so nor does it match the desires of the majority of Afghans for the Taliban to return to governance. For example, the results of the 2012 Asia Foundation survey found that 63% of Afghans do not sympathize with the Taliban or insurgents.³⁶ By contrast, the people also have a positive view towards their Army, a fact where 93% support Afghan Army operations.³⁷ Where the Taliban have been successful in very tactical and localized areas, it has been because there is a general lack of security and governance by GIRoA to protect the population from the coercion by insurgents.

Local Governance

Counterinsurgency operations throughout Afghanistan have yielded some good achievements with district governance, in support of provincial governments, where little had existed before. Local governance is where Afghan people interact with their

government on a daily basis. Food rations, licenses for businesses, and other programs are distributed or issued from district governments. For example, most agricultural development programs are funneled through the district governors and councils for the farmers in Kunar Province. There are systems of governance, still under resourced and moving at glacial speeds, which nonetheless work on a daily basis more directly for the people.

In spite of massive problems with aid, reconstruction and development, roads and bridges, for example, construction has positively affected the economic development of the areas affected.³⁸ The popular saying, “where the road ends, the insurgency begins” leaves out the most important point. Where there are roads, there is prosperity, economic development and governance. Stability follows. Undoubtedly, the most visible signs of progress in the country are the large influx of automobiles, gas stations, roadside markets, increased schooling (and schools built), and cell phones. Perhaps most telling is that although the coalition efforts have been mixed over the past 12 years, and that the Afghan government has issues with endemic corruption, the vast majority of the Afghan population does not desire a return of a Taliban-style government. Though not definitive, the majority of the Afghan people like the progress from their local and provincial governments. This metric alone bodes well for a future, stable Afghanistan after 2014. A supportive population will only enable ANSF to progress and become more and more effective.

ANSF Development

For the coalition and GIRoA, the other visible sign of progress has been the creation and fielding of the various Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) following

the rapid overthrow of the Taliban government. After the coalition worked with the Northern, Eastern and Southern Alliances to overthrow the Taliban and hunt for al-Qaeda, various warlords and regional power brokers and their armies tried to fill the security void. As part of the First Bonn Agreement in December, 2001 and subsequent declarations from the 2002 *Loya Jirga*, Afghanistan would undergo a massive Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) process for all the warlords and fighters who were essentially the alliances who helped overthrow the Taliban in 2001-2002. This was an essential condition to begin Security Sector Development (SSD) to create the ANSF, which would be a nationalized program beholden to any warlord or entity other than the Afghan Government.³⁹ It is therefore conspicuous that the ANSF that are fielded today, which did not exist in 2002, are now in the transition period to take over security on their own as NATO forces withdraw. It is even more amazing that this is happening in the midst of an ongoing coalition campaign against a hostile insurgency.

The indicators of ANSF progress show some positive signs thus far. There are several good examples today where ANSF have taken the lead in contentious areas and performed well. One such example, Operation KALAK HODE V, carried out in September 2012 in Zabul Province, exemplifies the ANSF's growing abilities. This three-week operation, which involved more than 11,000 Army and Police, was principally Afghan-planned, -led, and -manned.⁴⁰

As of December, 2012, the Afghan National Army are already leading over 85% of all operations.⁴¹ Though challenged today to be operational and self-sustaining, the recruiting, training, fielding and employment of ANSF has been remarkable in such a

short period and all while during a protracted counterinsurgency campaign. Now that forces have been generated in strength, it remains the focus of the coalition to continue their development as an institution. This remains the challenge: building the connective tissue amongst the officer and NCO corps and professionalizing the force in a way that accounts for Afghan cultural norms. This will take time and is much harder than recruiting, forming, and training Soldiers alone.

What Hasn't Worked So Far: Unsustainable Costs

The current Afghan government and its security apparatus have made significant strides since coming into being. However, their development, in essence, the strategizing of counterinsurgency writ large as nation-building, has been expensive. From 2001-2006, the costs of Operation Enduring Freedom were no more than \$20 billion per year, and there were never more than 25,000 coalition troops on the ground.⁴² These costs increased tremendously after the surge began. For the period 2010-2012, the average costs per year exceeded \$100billion, a five-fold increase in known costs that accounted for both increased troop presence to support and monies to infrastructure, aid and development for large projects.⁴³ President Obama has stated that the costs associated with the war in Afghanistan are not sustainable and that there is much needed nation-building at home given the current state of our national economy. Economic will to continue funding Afghanistan, tied to a lack of clearly visible returns in security and stability, has understandably run its course.

Political Will

Historians have largely agreed that during the Vietnam War, North Vietnam was ultimately successful against the United States due to the war's impact upon the will of

the citizens of the U.S. to continue support for prosecuting a war they gradually believed was of no importance.⁴⁴ In fact, President Johnson did not seek a second term in office in 1968 primarily due to the human costs associated with an unclear gain in outcome of the war had led to the atrophy of public support. The American people were heavily questioning any value of the war's effort and the reasons for intervention in the first place. The lesson for Afghanistan and other limited wars of insurgencies, the will of the people executing the mission must remain supportive. Joint doctrine of counterinsurgency for all services reflects counterinsurgency as "a contest of wills" and its strategic effect upon the outcome.⁴⁵ Strategic support of a nation is thus a vital element required for a successful outcome against an insurgency. If popular sentiment fails to support military action, it becomes politically infeasible to continue.

This atrophy of U.S. public will has been the main effort by the both al-Qaeda and the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan: to wait out the coalition over time as western countries contributing to the effort eventually tire and exhaust from supporting a costly and lengthy war effort overseas.⁴⁶ This has been a leading factor in the steady erosion of public support in the U.S. for war in Afghanistan. AQ's attacks in Madrid, Spain (2004) and London, England (2005) were aimed directly at coalition support to Iraq and Afghanistan and were therefore direct attacks on the collective political will for those countries to fight.⁴⁷ In the case of the Madrid train bombings, the new Spanish government rapidly decided to withdraw all Spanish troops from Iraq. This will of people to support protracted counterinsurgency campaigns, which are inherently costly in monies, human capital and time, is our critical vulnerability and strategic center of gravity. In our joint doctrine, we acknowledge this paradox of effort to protect the

population where the more time is needed to accomplish COIN goals, the more likely coalition efforts are seen as occupiers and thus exacerbate the insurgency rather than being the catalyst for its defeat. Afghanistan has a history of exhausting foreign armies from Persians, the British, and more recently the Soviets.⁴⁸ The Pashtun saying, “you may have the watches, but we have the time” is an acknowledgement that such long efforts by foreigners usually come to an inconclusive outcome in the *Hindu Kush* (Land of the Hindu Killer).⁴⁹ As stated previously, the American public has eschewed supporting the war in Afghanistan in growing percentages every year.

A second factor that erodes our political will has been self-induced. The articulation of our strategy in Afghanistan has been incoherent to the degree where neither the American or Afghan people understand why we’ve been in Afghanistan for 12 years. Many cannot recall the original reasons U.S. forces deployed to Afghanistan or how and why the U.S. and NATO objectives and strategy has changed. No recent survey lists Afghanistan or terrorism in general as important issues to the American public.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly affecting this position is that our focus shifted resources and efforts to Iraq from 2003 to 2009 which could have been used to more quickly stabilize Afghanistan. This poor messaging of the missions and reasons why has contributed largely to the public’s perception that there is little apparent connection to where stability in Afghanistan benefits our vital strategic interests.

In the abstract, our support to Afghanistan does not directly support vital U.S. interests, but rather, does so indirectly through our prosecution of al-Qaeda. Collective sentiment is now where both the people of Afghanistan and the people of the United States want our forces to withdraw.⁵¹ As a result, any future assistance to Afghanistan

must preclude missions involving large combat operations and the troop levels that are associated with such force structure; neither of which would be palatable. Future strategy and support for Afghanistan must account for the reality of the current political will of the populations of both countries.

Denial of Sanctuaries

An essential component of any successful counterinsurgency campaign is the denial to the enemy sanctuaries and staging bases that are beyond the reach of the COIN force. It is well-documented that AQ leadership fled to Pakistan in response to the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and the overthrow of Mullah Omar and the Taliban Regime. Once military pressure, in the form of combined forces on the ground was introduced, AQ lost ground along with Taliban forces and had nowhere else to go but fall back to known sanctuaries believed to be out of the reach of the coalition.⁵²

Strategically, AQ and many of their associated movements have been found predominately in the FATA and other areas of Pakistan using these areas to base, much as their forefathers did in the 1980s during the Soviet Jihad. Key leaders involved in 9/11 planning and support, such as Khalid Sheikh Muhammed (KSM) and Ramsi Yousef, were detained in Pakistan, where they believed they were beyond the reach of the coalition. The Haqqani Network (HQN), Terek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and even leadership of the Afghan Taliban have all been based in Pakistan, yet continue to either directly or indirectly support operations across the border into Afghanistan.⁵³ Mullah Baradar, the military commander of Afghan Taliban and the #2 leader of the Taliban, was captured in 2010 in Karachi and has yet to be released. More striking is that the successful and unilateral U.S. raid to kill or capture Osama bin Laden in May, 2012 was

done in secret, without the approval or knowledge of the Pakistan government, deep in Pakistan's sovereign territory.⁵⁴ Osama bin Laden obviously felt safe in Abbottabad for nearly 7 years, living the entire time within a mile from the nation's Kakul Military Academy. Other than well-calculated raids and extensive use of targeted operations against terrorist group leadership primarily through armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), the coalition has been unable to affect the sanctuaries of western Pakistan provided to AQ and associated movements, including the leadership of the Afghan Taliban.

It has been politically unacceptable for the U.S. to conduct operations in Pakistan, a sovereign nation, to clear insurgents and extremist terrorism from their bases. The only ground forces available to address the sanctuaries in Pakistan have been the Pakistan Military in the form of the Frontier Corps and at times the XI Corps. These are the proxy forces and coalition partners by which the U.S. and other coalition partners rely upon to clear enemy forces from the safe havens they enjoy. The Pakistan Military (PAKMIL), having conducted many large operations against primarily Pakistani insurgent groups in the FATA and KP, has at best only been marginally effective.

One unintended consequence of large PAKMIL operations, such as OPERATION LION HEART in Bajaur Province in 2008, has been to create the opportunity and necessity for disparate insurgent groups to work together.⁵⁵ The pressure achieved by PAKMIL has been effective to the point of driving many movements closer together. This collusion of efforts, leaders, fighters and technical capabilities has been an effective way for insurgents and terrorists to mass effect by

pooling and sharing resources. According to now deceased Pakistani journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad, al-Qaeda advisors have embedded with TTP, Lashgar-e-Tayiba (LeT) and Afghan Taliban elements providing funding and technical resources to attack PAKMIL or coalition forces.⁵⁶ In fact, the Tehrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) arose as a result of increased PAKMIL operations in the FATA where independence and autonomy are part of the cultural norm. TTP arose specifically as an alliance to fight the Pakistan Military intrusion into the affairs of the region.⁵⁷ Likewise, the push by PAKMIL into the FATA region has had the unintended consequence of pushing many groups, leaders and fighters across the border into Afghanistan sanctuaries. This is due primarily to the fact that ISAF failed to directly support PAKMIL operations as they pushed fighters towards the border. No anvil of ISAF was ready for the PAKMIL hammer.⁵⁸ Lastly, the Pakistan military is the only force on the ground east of the border and they have yet to maneuver to any effect in North Waziristan where the Haqqani Network and its al-Qaeda associates remain safe from coalition prosecution. This is due primarily to the fact that the Haqqani Network uses extremist fighters for efforts against the U.S. and GIRoA across the border and are effective in turning extremist sentiment westward rather than eastward towards the government in Islamabad.⁵⁹ Even the most fair evaluation shows that the sanctuaries across the borders in Pakistan were essential for the Afghan Taliban to rebuild along with al-Qaeda Central to remain a viable organization and that the coalition's ability to deny their use has been a failure.

If the issue of sanctuary across the border cannot be directly addressed, the next best option is to ensure that stability and security in Afghanistan is enough to defeat the insurgents on their own soil. This is the nature of homeland defense as ANSF become

capable of preventing external efforts from influencing Afghanistan. This indirect approach is where the coalition's efforts at SFA are focused. By developing a credible and capable ANSF, Afghanistan will be better postured to defend their own territory from further aggression and prevent an operational or even strategic reemergence of al-Qaeda, their affiliates, and even an Afghan Taliban movement to overthrow Kabul.

Reconstruction and Development

In evaluating the effectiveness of reconstruction and development efforts across Afghanistan, the results are mixed. As stated previously, there are concrete examples where selected projects improved daily life in Afghanistan, such as bridge construction and most roads. But according to the Special Administrator for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the expenses and accountability of many programs shows a large degree of fraud, waste and abuse. In fact, there is data that supports the conclusion that large projects have done more to support Taliban insurgents through graft, corruption, and outright illegal taxation.⁶⁰ Many firms who have won bids for contracts outright paid Taliban groups not to attack their workers so that projects could reach conclusion. This in turn is income to pay Taliban fighters or fund operations elsewhere, exacerbating the security problem. Taliban might not attack that project, but they now have the means via extortion to focus attacks where they would rather conduct them.

There has also been an increasing level of evidence that corruption from such large contracting operations is resulting in U.S. dollars leaving the country to banks in the Arabian Gulf.⁶¹ This means monies meant to be used to support economic development and employment through projects and development are not being kept inside the country where its use is maximized for the benefit of the population. SIGAR

has found that oversight on contracting has been lacking overall, leading to the current state of investment in reconstruction and development.⁶² Lastly, the large increase in dollars in the country through development aid has created, according to Anthony Cordesman, an artificial economy that itself is unsustainable and ripe for collapse in the future.⁶³ In future aid and development efforts, these factors and more must be accounted for by administering aid only when accompanied by metrics that can measure progress. This development paradox, where too much money goes to waste for the righteous purpose of improving stability and prosperity and thus security, must find a sweet spot between too much and not enough.

What to Expect With Security Force Assistance Through 2014

With our understanding of the positive and negative lessons learned, it is clear why ISAF has shifted the mission of broad counterinsurgency to SFA and scoped down the focus mostly upon ANSF development. As with any country, Afghans need institutions and ANSF is the most credible institution they have and reflects national identity more than any other factor in Afghanistan. The sustainment plan for the ANSF calls for the overall police, Army and Air Forces end-strength to be 352,000 and remain at that size through 2015.⁶⁴ The ANSF are at the point where they are the main face of legitimacy in the government.

Evaluating and Analyzing the Best Options After 2014

For all of the U.S. and NATO forces to withdraw at the end of 2014, the ANSF must be minimally capable of providing for their security or there is significant strategic risk to Afghanistan and the region. However, it is unclear at this time if all of the ANSF will be fully capable by that time. As of November, 2012, only one ANA Brigade of the

23 is able to conduct independent operations without support from the coalition.⁶⁵

Although ANSF have shown their abilities to plan, prepare and execute military operations at the tactical level, they have yet to show operational achievements without coalition support. It is highly probable that a certain level of troops dedicated to training, advising and assisting ANSF even after the transition is complete. To the contrary, many factors give rise to the first course of action, the Zero Option, whereby nearly all forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2014 and not replaced. The missions supporting ANSF development would end precipitously if the coalition withdraws all forces.

Evaluating the Options—Comparison to Baseline Criteria

Each of the four options and their potential effectiveness will be compared across a baseline of distinct military and political evaluation criteria. Applying these criteria will allow for an objective analysis and selection of a best option for support to Afghanistan after 2014.

The first and most important evaluation criterion is the ability to achieve our vital national security interests through continued prosecution and eventual defeat of al-Qaeda. Second, the return of the Taliban to national governance must also be considered as a probability that lessens stability and thus enhances al-Qaeda and general instability for the region. Third, we look at courses of action that best defeats al-Qaeda's strategy in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region where they continue to desire to establish their headquarters and base, but desire to project a worldwide Islamic revolution from this area. Next, we consider how the government of Afghanistan remains supported as a legitimate political institution of the people, one which provides

services for and represents the people better than the competing insurgencies. The further development of the ANSF and their effectiveness, in both capability and capacity, is also considered. The commitment of the international community and donor nations to continue supporting the government of Afghanistan after 2014 is important, as I will show later in this paper by drawing historic parallels. Last, but extremely important is the political will for the U.S. to support one course of action over another as expressed in potential dollar and human costs. Later these criteria, in total, will be applied across the four proposed courses of action to determine which provides for the best outcome in Afghanistan.

The Zero Option—Complete Withdrawal

Calling for a complete removal of U.S. and NATO forces after 2014 is possible under several circumstances. A bilateral security agreement within the strategic partnership framework may not be achieved. Failure of international community support to continue may also prohibit continued military efforts inside the country. This would leave the legal status of U.S. and NATO forces on the ground without definition or necessary protections. This is a similar situation to our experiences in Iraq, 2011, where such protections or Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) were not achieved, resulting in complete withdrawal of combat troops and elements.⁶⁶

Likewise, eroding political will in concert with the continued high costs of the war may preclude any desire to continue on-the-ground support to ANSF, regardless of their efficacy by that point in time. The trends as seen through various surveys have only shown increasing negative percentages by respondents over the past few years when asked if all U.S. forces should completely withdraw from Afghanistan.⁶⁷ It could grow

politically unfeasible to remain, though a valid mission requirement could still be articulated. A zero-option is the best when considering political will and costs involved, but does little to affect the national security strategy and vital U.S. interests nor does it account for further regional stability and political engagement.

On the positive side, though less probable, the developing ANSF may obtain such credibility, efficiency and effectiveness to support themselves operationally against their security challenges to where western support on the ground is no longer needed. However, given the current arc of effectiveness projected through 2014, it is all but certain that ANSF will need some level of support on the ground in a continued assistance mission. Last, this course of action is less probable overall given the recent statements by President Obama at his 2013 State of the Union Address and the 2013 NATO ministerial summit in Brussels. At both events, national leaders articulated a commitment to missions on the ground, other than combat, that leaves a role for military forces to remain deployed.⁶⁸

Due to the projected requirement to have ANSF advisors and capabilities beyond 2014, a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces also has a high probability of Taliban resurgence, a protracted civil war, or the strategic reemergence of AQ in the country. The sudden withdrawal of international support at the end of 2014 has great potential to make conditions in 2015 Afghanistan similar to those of 1992 Afghanistan.

Focused COIN Operations—COIN Light

This option, a reversion to a counterinsurgency mission in selected areas, is a conditional option that would only be recommended if certain areas of the country require coalition direct assistance to ANSF. For example, U.S. forces may be called in

to work in concert with ANA forces for some duration to secure key lines of communication or populated areas in Key Terrain Districts (KTDs). This course of action is also less likely as there would be at least two essential elements for its employment. There would have to be a formal request by GIRoA/MoD for support and simultaneous acknowledgement that there are unacceptable setbacks to ANSF employment where insurgents have gained significant purchase where the population is openly supportive of government opposition. Recalibrating the coalition efforts upon COIN, even in selected areas, will directly face the challenges I have already described, namely the issues of political will and costs that would be incurred in doing so. However, ceding large populated areas and territory to the Taliban is enough to promulgate AQ resurgence within the borders of Afghanistan and could thus create tremendous pressure against Kabul and the legitimate Afghan government. Therefore, if this course of action were adopted, it would most likely be an employment option in Kandahar, Jalalabad or their surrounding districts that support and protect these key population centers.

CT Only—Prosecute Al-Qaeda

A third option acknowledges the defeat of AQ and associated movements as a vital national security interest—counterterrorism (CT). Secretary of Defense Panetta identified CT as the primary mission of U.S. presence in Afghanistan and will retain a force structure to support it.⁶⁹ Counterterrorism efforts in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan directly affect declared U.S. vital national security interest, namely to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and associated movements. The CT components of key leader and network targeting, shared intelligence, and information

operations are the essential programs that have been successful and will affect a positive CT strategy in Afghanistan's future.

The U.S. and NATO went to war in 2001 in Afghanistan as al-Qaeda effectively used a compliant host nation state (Taliban Afghanistan), ungoverned space, and vast, rugged terrain from which to plan, train, prepare and launch transnational terrorism and attacks against the west. President Obama has articulated that the focus of our strategic aim against al-Qaeda in the region has been emphasized in the past 11 years to varying degrees but it remains in our vital national interest to continue their defeat as an organization.⁷⁰ If this were to be the only option selected, it would consist mostly of special operations forces and their enabling combat power and would be around 1,000 troops and service personnel, thus presenting an appealing low-signature option.⁷¹

CT operations are subject to key limitations and constraints and in order to be successful, require a tremendous amount of support. The very nature of effective CT operations is built around the Find, Fix and Finish (F³) construct, with the entire targeting cycle including the facets of Exploit, Assess and Disseminate (making the construct F³EAD).⁷² The key to the Find element is consistent and even persistent use of multiple intelligence assets and their cross-cueing. Many high value targets (HVTs) take years to develop and find, as was the case with Osama bin Laden. Next, the Fix function that follows is usually time-sensitive in nature. It requires action on the target rapidly before the intelligence grows stale: probability of success diminishes over time. With kinetic strike operations, the Fix function is performed through continuous surveillance of the target as reported by signals intelligence (SIGINT), human intelligence, (HUMINT) or other assets. In raids, the Fix function is usually achieved by

this and the action of ground forces isolating the target and the surrounding objective. The Fix function obviously sets up the Finish of the target. A HVT that is fixed means that his movements and disposition are known and a precision strike can be called or a force can be introduced on the ground to finish the target with a high degree of certainty and limited collateral damage. However, with the introduction of ground forces, the effectiveness of the strike or raid is almost immediately understood. In addition, with CT forces on the ground, there is a much higher probability for rapid exploitation (follow-on operations) and more precise assessments that will potentially lead to other members and information about a network. Intelligence is said to drive operations, but the act of operations such as these can drive actionable intelligence for future missions and operations that continue to defeat a terrorist network.

No effective effort at CT in the region can be conducted without associated bases that are close enough to targets and networks from which to project selected and targeted raids with or without host nation forces. It would certainly make the intelligence gathering functions and the exploitations and assessment abilities of a CT campaign problematic as both time and distance are added to the F3EAD equation. Therefore, anything less than a CT footprint inside the borders of Afghanistan precludes any serious efforts towards CT operations against AQ and associated movements simply due to the necessity to have a footprint forward. At minimum, this requires an enduring forward base and airfield within operational reach of target areas, but will most likely require several such forward bases. Initially, it may be appealing to draw all or most CT operations from one such base within Afghanistan. This would pool resources and make it easier to secure CT operations by reducing efforts from one location. Support

and security requirements would be minimized and thus both service personnel and troop signatures reduced. However, husbanding these resources into one enduring base away from the front lines of where CT operations are being executed, say at Bagram Airfield, discounts the significant terrain, weather and operational requirements for success.⁷³

There are significant limitations to capabilities for both the platforms that carry raid forces to their HVT objectives (the assault helicopters) as well as the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets that can be dual-rolled into kinetic strike packages (such as MQ-1 Predator or MQ-9 Reaper). First, there are simply the performance aspects of assault and lift platforms designed to carry raid forces to targets. MH-47 and MH-60 aircraft, along with their general purpose CH-47 and UH-60 cousins, are only intratheater capable aircraft and beholden to altitude, visibility, temperature and severe weather conditions that can significantly impact performance. Afghanistan presents these conditions in spades and in numerous locations throughout the country. Bagram weather conditions to launch aircraft may be exceedingly different than the objective areas much further east. In addition, the combat radius (the maximum distance allowed to an objective and still be able to return) of the CH/MH variants are about 200 miles and the MH/UH is around 300 miles carrying a full complement of combat-equipped troops.⁷⁴ But to carry to maximum allowable cargo load (ACL), the flight generally cannot exceed 4500' mean sea level. At higher altitudes, lift performance is impacted and thus less troops and equipment. My experience in these aircraft at over 9000 feet shows where we had to reduce the ACL in half just to safely insert combat forces and their equipment at that altitude.⁷⁵ There are increasing

lift challenges if the ambient temperatures are hot, where expanding air creates problems generating and sustaining lift. Storms from rain, snow, and dust impact visibility at any time in the country. Given the high altitude of many parts of Afghanistan or even crossing the border into Pakistan requires any air asset to account for these impacts to flight dynamics and that the conditions change dramatically enroute given the varying nature of the different terrain.

The point here is that the further back you are from the target objective be it for observation, surveillance, kinetic strike, or insertion of troops, the more challenged you will be and a higher risk incurred. Only the positioning of redundant CT assets, in multiple forward locations can overcome this challenge. It also gives to the CT campaign flexible options and does not limit possibilities to just one. If Bagram AB is socked in for ceilings and visibility, but there is a known AQ target inside Pakistan, the weather is going to have to clear before any strike can happen. In the meantime, without a fixing ability, the target will likely move. There will be a greater challenge to fix the enemy after he is found if there is not a finish option. This problem is obviously compounded when CT operations have to originate from outside of Afghanistan. Increasing the distance increases uncertainty of a successful conclusion.

Using the construct of Find, Fix and Finish, Network Targeting against al-Qaeda requires ISR assets and cross-intelligence cueing amongst the various disciplines to fully refine targeting data. Loiter times for ISR platforms to determine patterns of life of AQ and insurgent leadership in remote areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan must be considerable in order to meet legal strike requirements of proportionality and target discrimination. With a ceiling of 25,000 feet and a range of 600 miles, the MQ-1

Predator has significant problems getting to target areas from Bagram Airbase given the numerous mountain ranges and isolated weather conditions in the region that are problematic to the aircraft's performance. The MQ-9 Reaper, though with better range, loiter and payload capabilities, still has the terrain and weather impacts upon its performance.⁷⁶ With the terrain and weather impacts that affect ISR and lift operations, we can see the impact of moving persistent CT operations to one centralized base like Bagram. The finding assets, fixing assets and finish assets or forces must all be in close proximity to the objective or target to conduct the operation. This is the major reason why these assets are positioned forward along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border today and not husbanded in one location where their effectiveness would be significantly degraded.

For CT raids that would potentially be conducted where U.S. forces are actually on the ground conducting the kill or capture mission, a higher requirement of support is needed. Aside from ISR support requirements, putting U.S. forces into harm's way against a hostile, thinking enemy carries a high degree of risk that is only mitigated by multiple and redundant measures. All of which also require forward positioning, as close to the target locations as possible. It is instructive to know that the raid against Osama bin Laden was not conducted from out of the country or from Bagram Airbase. It was conducted from Jalalabad airfield (about 150mi from the target location), a scant few kilometers from the Pakistan border where assets could be positioned forward to better support such a critical mission.⁷⁷

These environmental conditions thus present significant friction that undermines the time sensitive nature of high value targeting of AQ leadership. In another example,

President Clinton's response to al-Qaeda's bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 was to launch cruise missiles against training camps in Khowst Province, where intelligence believed AQ leadership would be present. This method was primarily used as there was no viable option for forces to go into Afghanistan with a raid designed to kill or capture AQ leadership. There was very little intelligence to support the Find function and almost no ability to Fix any target thereafter. As a result, there was never any Finish. There simply were no assets positioned forward (Combat Search and Rescue, Quick Reaction Forces, etc.) that are essential supporting elements when inserting raid forces on the ground. The strike was mostly ineffective, as it missed Osama bin Laden and other key leaders who had been present but had recently departed.⁷⁸ Part of the reason for this ineffective strike operation was the time needed to plan and authorize the strike. But the primary reason was that there was no fixing force or even ISR to contain or track targets during the strike.

Without significant support presence inside Afghanistan, counter terror operations originating outside of the country will be severely impacted by the limiting factors of operational reach and logistics. We can see that due to the terrain and weather effects along with operational limitations of ISR platforms, multiple bases will be required inside Afghanistan from which to continue prosecuting CT missions. It gets difficult to prosecute the National Security Strategy against AQ if the correct disposition and composition of forces aren't physically positioned forward where they can best do something about the problem.

Given our current stance against AQ as articulated in our National Security Strategy, it is important to acknowledge that key leader targeting is in and of itself not

always decisive. Raids and high value targeting have enhanced military campaigns in history, and in particular in Iraq and Afghanistan, but by themselves have not directly produced the outcome and are thus tremendous enabling capabilities.⁷⁹ This is because some element of security and stability must remain to continue prosecution, prevent reconstitution, or more deeply, address the root causes of extremist violence in the first place.

For example, the increased reliance upon drone strikes in Pakistan as part of a CT campaign has, according to the Living with Drones study and others, exacerbated the perception upon both Pakistan and Afghan peoples that they indiscriminately target civilians.⁸⁰ In Pakistan, the outrage from the population is that the drones are used at all against a sovereign nation.⁸¹ In Afghanistan, the main outrage of the people is the perception of civilian casualties (CIVCAS) and the use of night raids in general, which are preferred by CT forces but are at cultural cross-purposes.⁸² There is considerable debate whether some CT operations are creating more insurgents and opposition to GIRoA, the Pakistan government and the U.S. than they are serving to support the defeat of al-Qaeda and associated movements.⁸³ Without complementary efforts of both ground forces and CT operations, there can be no certainty that the defeat mechanism for the insurgent or terrorist network has been achieved.

SFA + CT + Enablers—The Balanced Approach

The last option for discussion is a course of action that applies the current situation and operational environment, ongoing operations, relevant lessons learned and accounts for limitations and constraints to employment of forces. Continuing SFA to the degree necessary for the ANSF to be more operational and self-sustaining is

certainly warranted and, as described previously, will be required by the U.S. and NATO after the combat missions end in 2014.⁸⁴ Second, the continued physical destruction of al-Qaeda networks and associated movements, organizations, and their leadership through focused counterterrorism operations help support our direct vital strategic national interest in the region. Third, the ANSF will have capabilities gaps and the U.S. and coalition efforts will need coverage and protection by direct support units that provide aviation, logistics, and fire support to name a few.

The SFA mission footprint, as previously stated, would be based upon the effectiveness of ANSF in the conduct of independent operations without support. For example, the more that all 23 brigades of ANA are capable, the less U.S. advisors, trainers and support will be necessary. Less capable ANA forces would likewise mean more U.S. troop assistance on the ground. Planning figures place this troop requirement somewhere between 6,000 and 30,000, including enabling combat power.⁸⁵ On the low side, troop numbers reflect the minimum trainer/advisor coverage for ANSF elements north and south of Kabul that will most likely require assistance after 2014. These ANSF are the essential forces positioned on the eastern part of the country where the vast majority of Taliban and AQ combat has always been. The higher numbers of troops reflect concern that each Regional Command has ANSF elements that will still need higher level training and assistance as well, thus increasing the numbers required.⁸⁶

In addition, these coalition advisors will need force protection, medical and other enabling capabilities (or “coverage”) and depending upon their distribution across the country will require forward positioning of these assets. These advisor support forces

(combat support, combat service support) are included in the troop requirement estimate. LTG(R) James Dubik articulates a case that the direct support mission for any main effort in Afghanistan will require elements or complete organization of Fires, Intelligence, Aviation and Sustainment brigades.⁸⁷ There are three primary reasons to have these direct support elements. One reason would be to fill ANA combat power requirements in areas where their capabilities are not resident. Second, direct support elements bolster ANA confidence until their capability gaps are filled with organic systems. Third, there is an inherent requirement to support U.S. and NATO forces in their primary missions with our capabilities and systems. The total sum of this direct support mission would be between 16,000 and 20,000 troops on the ground alone.⁸⁸

Enabling Coalition Combat Power

The provision of coalition enablers after the security transition in 2014 speaks to the truth that ANSF has inherent weaknesses as an organization today that will simply not be overcome in less than two more years of development. Since their inception, we have been with ANSF at each step ensuring their success with our forces and capabilities where theirs did not exist. Beyond needing the advice, mentorship and training assistance from NATO, ANSF are absolutely concerned with their lack of artillery, attack and lift aviation support, MEDEVAC, and obvious intelligence domination capabilities we provide for them and currently bring to the battlefield.⁸⁹ Understandably so, as they have seen their western partners effectively employ a wide array of capabilities and employ synchronized combined arms in an overwhelming manner during any battle from which the enemy cannot recover. The battlefield becomes more level, however, when it is an Afghan Soldier-on-insurgent fight. Though insurgents do

not have artillery and aviation support themselves, their strength comes from their ideology that appeals to some, their coercive abilities to others when no counterforce is present, and their ability to blend with the population, all of which gives the insurgents a relative advantage over the ANSF. Without critical enabling combat power to overwhelm the enemy and the logistics to sustain them, ANSF will not operationalize and be effective in future engagements and battles with insurgent groups. It is all but certain these capabilities will not be resident in the ANSF by 2015.⁹⁰ These are the formations and force structures such as aviation, logistics, fires, intelligence, and trauma-capable medical capabilities that add to western commitment. These enabling assets also protect western advisors and trainers as well and reduce their risk of being forward-positioned. Adding enabling combat power to the range of military options certainly hedges our bets that success will tilt towards GIRoA.

Having Reserves

An Operational Reserve (OPRES) force further hedges against uncertainty and mitigates risk of dispersed coalition Soldiers positioned across the country. A battalion task force headquarters, three rifle companies, and tactical support elements (approximately 600 Soldiers) provides this core capability in country after 2014, protecting troops accomplishing the three core mission sets stated above. This OPRES force may be further enabled with some of the enablers already provided (such as aviation) and the CT forces. In any case, this reserve force will require additional combat troops with associated command and control to develop planning priorities to reinforce ANSF or coalition forces in extreme circumstances and prevent potential failures. A reserve capability, with low overhead, can be rapidly moved and committed

as the security environment warrants and provides the future coalition commander with options.

The Comparison and Selection for the Way Ahead

Each course of action described in the previous section contained some small analysis of each COA against previously introduced evaluation criteria. These evaluation criteria have allowed for an objective comparison of the four proposed courses of action and are broadened here for explanation. The chart below lists each of the evaluation criteria and further defines each criterion and the value (valence) attributed to each. This will then further allow why COAs with better values of these important evaluation criteria should be adopted over others.

Criterion	Definition and Valence
Defeat AQ	Best supports stated vital National Security Strategy to Disrupt, Dismantle, and Defeat AQ. Weighted twice the value over all other criteria as this criterion best conforms to U.S. Policy and strategic engagement
Taliban Reemergence	Best prevents probability of National Taliban reemergence in Afghanistan (favorable condition for return of AQ)
AF/PAK Sanctuaries	Best addresses denial of sanctuaries in the AF/PAK border region that are extant threat to future Afghan stability
Supports GIRoA	Best addresses strategic support to the Afghan Government and its further development into a legitimate institution
Develops ANSF	Best addresses the continued development of capacity and capability of Afghan forces to provide adequate security
International Support	Best meets requirements to maintain or build support from the international community with respect to economic, diplomatic and/or military aid to Afghanistan
Political Will	Best conforms to the popular sentiment and government policies of the U.S. with respect to continued human and dollar costs in Afghanistan

Figure 1-1: Criterion Definitions and Valence

With the definitions and values for criteria assigned, we apply the criteria to each proposed COA. The chart below summarizes the distinct advantages and relative disadvantages in our proposed courses of action given and visually describes how the balanced approach best meets all criteria. To show the research in a simple diagram, a numerical value between 0 and 3 is selected for each criterion and placed against a course of action. This represents the strength of the criterion as to a course of action. A criterion given a higher number better achieves the goal of the criterion; the lower the number, the less this criterion is supported by a particular COA. A higher aggregate score by adding up the totals for each criterion against a particular COA will show which COA is best. As a reminder, “Defeat AQ” is our only weighted criterion with a value of twice that of any other value so as to distinguish both its importance and impact upon selection.

	Military			Political				TOTALS
Criterion COA	Defeat AQ	Taliban Reemergence	AF/PAK	Supports GIROA	Develops ANSF	International Support	Political Will	
Zero Option	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
Focused COIN	1 (2)	2	2	2	2	1	1	12
CT-Only	3 (6)	2	2	2	1	2	2	17
SFA +CT + Enablers	3 (6)	3	2	3	3	2	1	20

Figure 1-2: COA Comparison Matrix

It is clear from the matrix above that the Zero Option is least-preferred. It simply does not have support from many of the evaluation criteria. The issue of political will is most supported in that this COA provides for little to no troops or other resources in Afghanistan. It assumes great risk in by not supporting ANSF development or the government of Afghanistan. As a result of doing nothing, no other objectives or criteria can be met. This COA does not result in the defeat of AQ in their homeland, the AF/PAK region; a critical component of our vital national security interest.

A Focused COIN consideration is possible if future situations warrant. As stated previously, it would have to be at the invitation by GIROA and for a very specific purpose to help ANSF and the government in areas where the population is directly threatened and associated indirect threat to the national government. It is not valuable against

defeating AQ as it focuses on securing the population of a given area. Nor does it conform to current and projected issues of political will and support from the international community. The lack of political will from COIN stems from the considerable ongoing debate whether COIN in Afghanistan has been as effective as the doctrine describing it has espoused. Much of the reason for this has been that COIN was utilized as a strategy rather than the vehicle, or tactic, to be employed on the ground in support of a broader strategy.⁹¹ History will be a better guide to COIN efficacy, but here another surge of American forces for COIN will be a challenge politically as it will certainly cost the most of our courses of action in dollars alone.

A CT-Only option is the next-best plan that best addresses support to the National Security Strategy by focusing on AQ and Taliban senior leadership. As such, it addresses the AF/PAK sanctuary issue and thus has good potential to prevent a Taliban reemergence. This option is the next best when you apply international support and political will factors in the evaluation: small costs, both in economic and human investments, are very small in this approach. However, the biggest challenge to this COA is that it does very little to nurture and develop the ANSF, save for potential ANSF CT forces only. As stated earlier, CT forces complement a campaign, but show little promise of becoming a strategy themselves that support stability in Afghanistan when not coupled to a larger plan. CT-Only as an option does little to prevent the ANSF from fracturing, and thus potentially the Afghan government itself, in the face of certain insurgency problems in the years ahead.

We conclude that the Balanced Approach is best, with the provision of SFA, CT and coalition enablers, all of which reinforce success and prevent failure in Afghanistan.

Though more costly than other approaches, and thus drawing a lower score for political will, this COA best addresses AQ defeat, GIRoA support, and ANSF development to continue to provide stability in their country in the future. There is also a measurable amount of international support to this option after 2014 as President Obama has stated that trainers and advisors will be needed long after the combat missions end. This Balanced Approach is the best option at lowest cost possible to achieve the defeat mechanism for AQ while simultaneously supporting longer term stability in Afghanistan and thus addressing the issues of extremism in the region.

Essential Conditions for Future Success

Regardless of timeline, several key factors and enabling conditions will determine success, or failure. They are Afghan Presidential elections in 2014, international commitment beyond 2014, positive engagement with Pakistan, and concerted efforts at reconciliation, primarily between Afghan Taliban and GIRoA. Efforts along these four fronts are vital for successful security transition after 2014.

Time for a New President and Administration

Of importance to the Afghan people is the Afghan Presidential elections currently slated for April, 2014. President Karzai's term is up and Afghans want change. Karzai is on record saying that these elections must happen and he will step aside and let the process happen as he is constitutionally prevented from a third term.⁹²

This is good, as the Presidential election is important to the success of the NATO withdrawal in 2014 for several reasons. First, it provides for the much-needed legitimacy of the Afghan government to continue efforts to represent the people. Conducting an on-time national election in fulfillment of the Afghan Constitution projects

power, legitimacy and transparency and is a strong case against insurgent propaganda that targets the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA).⁹³ Any emergency powers enacted or delays to the election, say into 2015, will cause significant anxiety with not only the international community but directly with the Afghan people.⁹⁴ Second, a new Afghan government will be a symbol of the change that is to happen: true Afghan sovereignty and ownership. Karzai is still seen as tied to the U.S. and recent surveys from the Afghan population show the majority think we've worn out our welcome.⁹⁵ We helped install him early on. A new president, one elected with great leadership potential for the country, will be seen to be mostly separate from this western "baggage".

The security transition in Afghanistan cannot happen unless there is stable government. Security in Afghanistan won't come at the end of 2014 just because the ANSF are trained and equipped. ANSF will continue to need backing and GIROA will need support as well. Political will that comes from legitimately elected and competent national leadership that is focused on the protection of the Afghan people and the state is an important step. Corruption and patronage in the country most likely will not end with a new President, but a change in leadership sends a powerful signal that government institutions are here to stay. Coupled with ever-capable and credible ANSF, Afghanistan only grows. Staying on track with regards to the presidential election of an effective leader for the country in April 2014 is therefore a key enabler to this future success.⁹⁶

Continued Support and Commitment by the International Community

A second important component in the security transition is the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan beyond 2014. NATO has already acknowledged this, declaring that it is committed to providing security forces as trainers and advisers in the years following as well as significant economic support packages terming the post-2014 period, the “Transition Decade”.⁹⁷ But commitment to Afghanistan must be much more than just to the military. The international community can and must continue to dedicate economic aid and support packages to the government of Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. Simply put, Afghanistan does not have the GDP to support the current level of ANSF at 182,000 troops and approximately 150,000 police or anything close to these levels.⁹⁸ If there is no security, there is no governance. If there is no governance, the Taliban and al-Qaeda will have the ability to reestablish primacy in the country, or at least claim great swaths of it. Al-Qaeda does not need to have all of Afghanistan in chaos to obtain the basing they would need again. AQ would only need chaos in some areas that the government can no longer exert control to achieve the minimum conditions of their future goals.⁹⁹

In 2012, NATO and the U.S. spent \$118 billion on efforts in Afghanistan for a broad counterinsurgency mission.¹⁰⁰ While these numbers are neither politically nor economically sustainable by donor nations at these levels, Afghanistan will still require significant economic support for its security forces and its government to function in power until they are stable enough to support themselves. Many planners believe the realistic number that support ANSF and governance is around \$10-15 billion/year; \$20-25 billion when adding total costs for potential footprints of NATO forces that may remain after 2014.¹⁰¹ Although there is an estimated \$3 trillion in precious metals and

gems under the Afghan earth yet to be exploited, it will take years for industries and infrastructure to reach them and make them marketable for the coffers of the Afghan government.¹⁰² The same is true regarding natural gas and oil deposits, revenues produced either in Afghanistan or tariffs to be charged on pipelines that would potentially carry gas across the country. All of these potential growth commodities will take time to develop to provide a basis of economic support to the country. Therefore, the international community must continue to invest economic support packages until Afghanistan further develops its GDP. Critically, this must come with metrics that hold GIRoA accountable for the support they receive. Else our collective efforts will continue the dependency paradox.

Lessons From Najibullah's Grave

It is important to note the cost of not supporting Afghanistan economically versus the cost required of continued support to the country's stability. As a lesson for this, we need look no further back than the experiences drawn from President Mohammed Najibullah's government after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. After the last elements of the 40th Soviet Army crossed over the Amu Darya River back into the USSR from Afghanistan in February, 1989, Najibullah's regime was thought to be on the verge of collapse.¹⁰³ Najibullah lasted for almost another three years. It lasted primarily because the Soviet Union continued to give aid to Najibullah for his security forces to defeat the mujahedeen groups to the tune of over \$3billion a year.¹⁰⁴ With backing, the security forces were successful. When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, the money stopped immediately. Three months later, Najibullah and the Afghan government was then overthrown by various mujahedeen groups working together.

This was enabled by the U.S. and Saudi matching aid packages to mujahedeen and Afghan refugee operations and programs now reduced to a mere \$400-500 million each year from 1990-1992. Enough to keep the mujahedeen pressure on the Najibullah-led Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).¹⁰⁵ We are left to ponder the staying power of the Najibullah regime if his security forces continued to be paid, armed, equipped and trained to defeat the mujahedeen groups all violently competing for power in Kabul. With further extrapolation, it may even be surmised that the Afghan Taliban would never have come to power in 1994-1996, their success being due primarily to the deep security vacuum that reverted Afghanistan to ungoverned chaos and fiefdoms of warlord states once Najibullah was overthrown. One only has to look at this relatively recent historical narrative to draw relevant parallels to our situation in Afghanistan after 2014. Clearly, the international community must remain committed to the GIRoA and a political solution unlike our goals in the 1980s that were solely focused on defeat of a Soviet military organization.

Najibullah's political capital likewise didn't collapse immediately after the withdrawal of the Soviets. His efforts to bring mujahedeen groups into the political process, including significant amendments to the Afghan constitution, were the beginnings of what might have been a reconciliation process. But once the Afghan security forces collapsed from lack of support and payment, the mujahedeen saw the opening and took advantage of the vacuum being created.¹⁰⁶ With no threat of capable Afghan security forces in their way, the mujahedeen groups had no incentive to resolve disputes through diplomacy or political dialogue. Najibullah's lesson in political capital by involving everyone under the tent is the third important enabling condition for

Afghanistan beyond 2014: a dedicated and coherent effort towards the reconciliation process involving the Afghan Taliban and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Time for Serious Talks—Reconciliation and Reintegration

This leads us to a third critical enabling condition for success in Afghanistan: reconciliation between GIRoA and the Taliban. It is likely that the conservative ideology underpinning the Taliban will never be truly defeated. It is only realistic to defeat the Taliban's violent opposition to GIRoA. Participation in government by the Taliban is much preferred to a large civil war. Reconciliation is the political process by which nations end their civil wars as well as a component to how most insurgencies end as the fighters and guerillas are brought into the national political process with the government. As such it is the reestablishment of normal relations between former belligerents.¹⁰⁷ Many efforts have been made towards reconciliation in Afghanistan with mixed results. Berhanuddin Rabbani, former President of Afghanistan and the Commissioner for High Peace and Reconciliation and tremendous asset for the process, was assassinated in his home by Taliban agents posing and mediators desiring reconciliation dialogue. Mullah Baradar, a very senior Afghan Taliban leader, was detained in Karachi in 2010 by the Pakistan government, seemingly because he was trying to reach out to GIRoA and create a reconciliation dialogue.¹⁰⁸ It may very well be that the U.S. must acquiesce to a back seat in this process as the Taliban leadership view U.S. involvement in the peace process as an obstacle, not a catalyst for positive outcome.¹⁰⁹

The existing Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), which mainly focuses on the operational and tactical levels of reconciliation, must continue to be

supported and funded. The genesis of the APRP stems from the 2010 Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Jirga in Kabul where hundreds of Afghan tribal leaders met to discuss the topic of eventual Taliban integration into society.¹¹⁰ Quietly, this program has worked to affect the underlying causes of the Taliban insurgency and instability, and worked to bring in fighters from the Afghan Taliban back into citizenry. The APRP is a potential catalyst by taking some fighters off of the battlefield and bringing them into the fold of the government.¹¹¹

While there are many potential inroads to a serious level of talks, most agree that GIRoA, the Afghan Taliban, and Pakistan emissaries must be involved at a minimum.¹¹² A future of reconciliation is all but impossible without Pakistan's compliance in the outcome to assuage any concerns of their potential loss of strategic depth from a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul.¹¹³ But it is imperative that reconciliation efforts be worked alongside our aims at improving the Afghan security forces and their capabilities. Only this coercive force in Afghanistan will drive home the point to Taliban to be part of the reconciliation process and seek power sharing or continue to fight to exhaustion.

Pakistan's Future

Success with any strategy in Afghanistan must be continued positive engagement with Pakistan and its positive support to GIRoA. This requires economic support packages to continue military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and other areas where Afghan Taliban elements have freedom of movement. It was the Pakistan government that supported the rise of the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s and undoubtedly supports their efforts now.¹¹⁴ The topic of

regional strategy and our engagement with Pakistan is a very detailed evaluation for another paper. However, no discussion of the future of Afghanistan can be in isolation without involving Pakistan and the international community remaining supportive of Pakistan's stability. Pakistan has nuclear weapons, an unstable government, a history of military coups, a diminishing economy, supports insurgent groups in Kashmir and sees its greatest threat as nuclear-armed India.¹¹⁵ Pakistan is therefore the key player in both future reconciliation efforts with Afghan Taliban and enduring stability in the borderlands.¹¹⁶

Strategic Framework and Bilateral Security Agreement

All options above, minus the “zero option”, will require a bilateral security agreement (BSA) between the U.S. and GIRoA after 2014. A solid BSA between the host nation and international forces would spell out the specific roles, missions, and responsibilities of all parties. Having a sound legal framework for international forces on the ground inside the host country protects the integrity of the Soldiers conducting the essential missions as guests of the state. It will be a challenging prospect to conduct any military mission in the country without agreements regarding that status of and potential prosecution of coalition military members.

There is an associated level of risk given all the factors and the environment in Afghanistan that can be mitigated by focusing on the key conditions that must be prioritized in order to enable the successful security transition at the end of 2014. By focusing on the planning, preparations, voter registration, and support to presidential elections of competent leadership in 2014, the best possible political conditions of legitimacy and transparency will be established by Afghans as the end of 2014

approaches and the security transition is complete. It will be their process and their solution for the future. We will only need to support their transition. Second, by ensuring an enduring and focused commitment of economic support packages (primarily for ANSF development and security) from the international community, we will preclude any mistakes as we saw during the Soviet withdrawal period in the early 1990s. Last, without serious support to political reconciliation efforts, no enduring political solution will be possible. Reconciliation does not have to be complete by the end of 2014: it is highly unlikely that some catastrophic success will be achieved here in the next two years. But it is important that the process remain a top diplomatic priority and efforts continue to develop this political solution for the country and the region.

The Counterarguments

Regarding the proposed solution for presence after 2014, there are several counterfactuals that should be addressed. One concern raised is the prospect that too many western troops can exacerbate the security environment in Afghanistan, giving the Taliban and other belligerents more reasons to keep fighting the occupation by western armies. This is a valid point however context to this argument is needed. Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, has said on numerous occasions that his prime goal is to fight the occupiers (western armed forces) in Afghanistan until they are defeated like the Soviets.¹¹⁷ However, the remaining U.S. and NATO forces after 2014 have neither a combat mission, nor would conduct combined or partnered operations, and their numbers are significantly reduced than present troop levels. The mission of training ANSF largely confines western forces to training bases and ANSF

headquarters areas. Those that do go forward, the SFA advisor teams, would be few in number. Their small presence embedded with Afghan units on a temporary basis is nothing like the current footprint of coalition forces. The overall appearance and signature in any of our options above is so reduced as to degrade Taliban propaganda to keep fighting western forces based upon any perceived occupation.

A second potential counterargument is the political concern of continuing to have U.S. and coalition support do so much for GIRoA after 2014, continuing a dependency paradox at all levels when we should be fostering independence.¹¹⁸ Another valid point but this assumes that we will continue to invest in infrastructure and institutions across the board in a comprehensive nation-building effort. This of course is not advocated in the road ahead. I have shown there is still disagreement as to how much aid and development positively impacts stability and security where the record in Afghanistan mixed.¹¹⁹ As mentioned, our coverage of enabling combat power bridges this capabilities gap after transition. ANSF will continue to own their Battlespace and the security mission. Western security elements won't be doing it for them as they won't be deployed in traditional formations of organic and complete combined arms organizations. It is difficult to reason that an ANSF kandak (battalion) would look to its 11 advisors to do the necessary work for them. In the past, when there were over 100,000 NATO Soldiers accomplishing a counterinsurgency mission where coalition forces units partnered directly with ANSF, this might have been the case. Scoping the mission and tailoring the western forces to accomplish them inherently prevents ANSF from even being able to look to NATO to do the work of security for them.

A third counterargument that has been raised before goes directly to our military options and which would best meet our strategic goals with the least cost. This would appear to be the CT option only, where our sole effort is towards defeating AQ and transnational terrorism in the area.¹²⁰ A mission of conducting only counterterrorism operations, with perhaps the essential force protection and enablers, would be the least costly in terms of resourcing and whole troop numbers on the ground. But choosing this COA alone does not address the overall condition of ANSF development and the stability they would provide inside Afghanistan. CT, while focusing upon the direct threat AQ and transnational terrorism presents to the U.S., does not address the enduring goal of keeping them and Taliban from coming back to Afghanistan. It would likewise be difficult to prosecute a CT campaign in the midst of an ongoing civil war, should Afghan security break down after 2014. A CT-only approach, while seemingly attractive given low cost and very low signature troop deployment numbers, is only one part of a solution that requires a balanced approach.

Recommendations

We have thus far described and analyzed multiple facets of the operational environment, assessed the historical perspective as well as the ongoing strategy in Afghanistan, and articulated key conditions and requirements for success after 2014. As a result of my analysis, I recommend that the U.S. adopt a balanced approach to missions that support our vital interests in Afghanistan and the region as a whole. The combination of trainers, advisors and counterterrorism forces in the country, along with selected key enablers, is the best option for stability and security in Afghanistan after 2014.

This balanced approach would mean a total force structure of uniformed service personnel around 12-15,000 troops in 2015. Much of this number depends upon the total number of advisors required and how far down ANSF echelons that they will be required. This should be the initial commitment from the U.S. and NATO contributions may help defray or offset some of these numbers as well. This troop commitment will continue a downward slope until all facets of the Afghan security sector is developed (it will take several more years for the Afghan Air Force to become operational).¹²¹ This should be a measured approach that determines requirements based upon stated gates of ANSF development. As markers continue to be achieved, troops return home from the mission. This supports the current U.S./Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement where we have pledged support through political, military and economic means to the Afghan government.¹²²

Financially, the costs associated with stability and security can be anticipated in the \$15-20billion range for 2015, tapering each year after based upon accomplished goals in governance and security. This would include all costs involved. The international community has already committed to providing \$4.1 billion with Afghanistan working to match funds in the overall effort to support the support the Afghan government. A similar recommendation has been reached by Dr. Collins at the National Defense University who has recommended a 15:20 plan, with 15,000 troops and \$20 billion in costs after 2014.¹²³

The added benefit of this course of action can only be our ability to have strategic warning in the region against issues in Pakistan and an emerging, potentially nuclear Iran. Continued intelligence resources that are present will be postured to support the

defeat of al-Qaeda through intelligence-driven CT operations. In addition, intelligence and diplomatic assets, by their volume, will be better positioned in this COA to determine if our second stated vital U.S. interest in the region, prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons, is in jeopardy. For Iran, having U.S. capabilities on the ground in Afghanistan potentially provides a certain hedge against their ambitions in the region. For Pakistan, our presence and support to the safety and security of their nuclear arsenal is only beneficial to all concerned.

Failure to Continue—What is the Worst that Could Happen?

Many words have been written describing the coming civil war in Afghanistan once coalition forces withdraw. On the extreme side, there is a feeling that Taliban groups will once again fight against the various ethnic and non-Pashtun alliances as we saw in the 1990s; this time, with much more destruction. It remains a large concern of the Afghan population.¹²⁴ However, with capable ANSF, this rising of the population against itself seems unclear if not conspiratorial. This potential scenario is only further abated through continued provision by the international community of aid to the government and training for the security sector. Continued support on the ground after 2014 is a good hedge for overall stability that prevents this catastrophic scenario from coming into being.

Either inside this catastrophe or in a lesser scenario, Taliban forces and al-Qaeda could once again see large areas of Afghanistan under their control. This is all that al-Qaeda would need, according to Dr. Miller, to present a challenge to our vital national security interest.¹²⁵ If Kandahar and the surrounding region were to all, or areas of eastern Afghanistan, such as Nuristan, Kunar and Laghman provinces, there

could potentially be the sanctuary that provides al-Qaeda just enough of what it needs to continue.

As stated previously, our support to Pakistan is vital and should focus upon three key areas. For one, PAKMIL operations, though not decisive, are the best methods the coalition has to address the sanctuaries in the FATA where introduction of western forces would undoubtedly spark a national uprising. Second, the tenuous hold the Pakistan government has on the country requires balance to ensure that extremists fighting that country cannot take hold. A very unstable Pakistan undoubtedly contributes to a very unstable Afghanistan. In this environment, we can see a reemergence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda where instability is a precondition for their survival. This is important as, third, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal must obviously remain secured. A "loose nuke" scenario, likely enabled from a chaotic government in Afghanistan or collaborator in the nuclear program, has tremendous potential to harm millions of innocent people either in the region, sparking a broader nuclear exchange with India, or destruction of a large metropolitan area of the west. Our continued support to Personnel Reliability Programs (PRP) that works to secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is an obvious and needed investment.¹²⁶

Economic support and military training provide the necessary stability and security in Afghanistan to best prevent these scenarios from playing out. Commitment after 2014, while measured to support ANSF continued development, has a more broad and positive impact upon regional stability.

In Summary

The strategy of a stable Afghanistan is a legitimate goal as it relates to the vital U.S. interest of the prevention of an al-Qaeda reemergence. A balanced approach of providing U.S. SFA, CT and supporting enablers has the greatest probability for a successful outcome. This will allow for continued ANSF development until they can become independent and operational. Insurgent groups are more confident fighting ANSF and western forces in Afghanistan whenever fires and aviation capabilities are not present.¹²⁷ As the security transition period approaches the end of 2014, NATO and the U.S. can ill afford any sink-or-swim strategy for the ANSF. This is because the end of 2014 will be the best period, in 13 years of conflict, for Afghan Taliban and other groups to push hard against ANSF and GIRoA if overwhelming combat power is not available to push back. Likewise, the continued prosecution of CT operations will continue to directly target AQ and transnational terrorist groups and actors in the regions aimed at securing our vital national security interest and strategic aim in Afghanistan. Last, this balanced approach allows for the best flexibility and opportunities for GIRoA to pursue the needed political solutions for the country to never again return to state-sponsored terrorism or even a place where AQ can effectively return. Keeping insurgent groups under pressure and at bay after transition through reinforced ANSF military strength as well as from the backing and support for GIRoA from the international community greatly increases the chances of Taliban exhaustion and eventual acceleration of reconciliation, a political solution that will be decisive for Afghanistan's future. Through this strategic approach that ties our stated vital U.S. interest to the missions and resources required to achieve it, the U.S. National Security Strategy will ultimately be successful.

Endnotes

¹ Barack Obama and Hamid Karzai, *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement Between the United States of America and The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspassignedtext.pdf>

² North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan: Issued by the Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Nations contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)*, Chicago, IL, May 21, 2012, section 5. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm

³ President Barack Obama, *President Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address to the Nation*. Full Transcript available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2013> Specifically, the President outlined two missions: "We're negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions -- training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country does not again slip into chaos, and counterterrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates."

⁴ Joseph J. Collins, "On the Eve of Afghanization", *Armed Forces Journal*, July/August 2011, p. 14. Available at www.armedforcesjournal.com Dr. Joe Collins article describing Afghanization as a comparative term to the Vietnamization process where both the Johnson and Nixon administration efforts were for the South Vietnamese to take on more of the security requirements against the VC and NVA.

⁵ Barack Obama, *The United States National Security Strategy*, The White House, May, 2010. P. 4. Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ UNDP.org, *Human Development Reports: Human Development Index*, 2011. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>

⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Afghanistan", *CIA World Fact Book*, 2011. Available at www.cia.gov.

⁹ Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Public Affairs/Perseus Book Group, 2011), p. 215. Many histories of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan describe the brutal clearing tactics used by the 40th Soviet Army. While there was significant human loss, many areas of infrastructure in southern Afghanistan were systematically destroyed, reducing centuries-old irrigation systems (karez) and severely impacting agricultural development.

¹⁰ Steven A. Zyck, "Opium Poppies and the Afghan Economy," *Civil-Military Fusion Center*, Norfolk Virginia, May, 2012, p.2

¹¹ UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Patterns and Trends," Vienna, Austria, December, 2012, p. 5.

¹² I observed several situations in Kunar Province, Afghanistan in 2010 where rural farmers deep in the valleys away from the Kunar River resolved disputes locally and sometimes with Taliban shadow governors or emissaries where the District Governor either held no sway or district judges would not hear the case.

¹³ Michael O'Hanlon, "Ex-Afghanistan Envoy: The Progress is Extraordinary," CNN.com, October 3, 2012. Available at: <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/03/ex-afghanistan-envoy-the-progress-is-extraordinary/> AMB Ryan Crocker used this phrase first in Iraq as US ambassador and again in Afghanistan as US ambassador to that country.

¹⁴ Fred Lucas, "Obama Has Touted Al-Qaeda's Demise 32 Times Since Benghazi Attack". *cnsnews.com*, November 1, 2012. Available at: <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/obama-touts-al-qaeda-s-demise-32-times-benghazi-attack-0>

¹⁵ Daveed Garterstein-Ross, "Reports of Al-Qaeda's Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated", *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2012. Available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/03/reports_of_al_qedas_death_have_been_greatly_exaggerated

¹⁶ Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places", Translated by Corporation for Public Broadcasting (PBS), 1996. Available at: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military/july-dec96/fatwa_1996.html Osama bin Laden describes his original complaints against the west and autocratic rulers in the Middle East and in particular, decries the ending of the last Caliphate in 1924 (by Kemal Attaturk) as the start of the decline of the pious Muslim Ummah. He argues a return of the lands once completely controlled by Islamic conquest, beginning with the destruction of the United States, whom he sees as the Far Enemy and the puppet states under their control (e.g., Saudi Arabia) the Near Enemy.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rajinder Puri, "Why Khorasan is Crucial," *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 23, 2012. Available at: http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=4051

¹⁹ Ali H. Soufan, *The Black Banners* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), xvii-xiv. Soufan's book title is itself significant. It is the symbol and description of the Islamic Army that comes from Khorasan to reclaim the lands of Islam and completes conquest once it reaches Jerusalem and reestablishes the Caliphate. Ali's story as an FBI agent who worked to track down al-Qaeda cells in the aftermath of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 2000 bombing of the *USS Cole*, puts him squarely in the center of history of al-Qaeda, their worldview and their strategy. Given his origins as a Lebanese-American, Soufan understood the emotional significance (and recruiting propaganda) that AQ placed on the hadiths that referenced Mohammed's prophecy of Khorasan and the Army of the Black Banners. This hadith threads its way through many of al-Qaeda's reason for being and where it bases itself in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan. AQ's reliance on these hadiths and their validity have many opponents in the Islamic *Ulema*, or scholars. In spite of a significant number of scholars downplaying the prophecy, it has been very effective for AQ.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

²¹ Ibid, xvii.

²² Ibid, xvii.

²³ Alia Brahimi, "Al-Qaeda Resurgent?", *Al-Jazeera Online*, November 8, 2012. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/11/2012113131929539319.html> Dr. Brahimi's excellent analysis articulates the disaffected groups in various countries of Africa and the Middle East are important, but most important is that al-Qaeda headquarters recover its operations after the death of Osama bin Laden.

²⁴ Andrew Natsios, "The Black Swan Threat of al-Qaeda in North Africa", *U.S. News and World Report Online*. 28 January, 2013. Available at: <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/01/28/mali-algeria-and-the-threat-of-al-qaeda-in-the-islamic-maghreb>

²⁵ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Zawahiri Calls for Continuing Egyptian Revolution, Kidnapping Westerners", *SITE Monitoring Service: Jihadist Threat* Available at: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/component/customproperties/tag/Leaders-Ayman%20al-Zawahiri> Zawahiri has made numerous video statements since Osama bin Laden's death that has supported the Arab Spring and general overthrow of autocratic regimes across the Middle East through jihad.

²⁶ Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, May 2011), pp. 10-12.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 12.

²⁸ Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), pp.54-57.

²⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, (New York, NY: Viking Press, 2011), pp. 191-192.

³⁰ Joseph J. Collins, pp.64-67

³¹ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Bi-Annual Report to Congress on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, December, 2012), pp. 9-10. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf.

³² Ibid, p. 35.

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³⁶ Asia Foundation, "Key Findings--Afghanistan in 2012: A Survey of the Afghan People," (Washington, D.C.: Asia Foundation, November, 2012), p. 6. Available at:

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³⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁸ Personal vignette: After the Jalalabad-Asadabad road was paved in 2009, several car dealerships and gas stations emerged along the route as well as numerous other shops and businesses along the newly-paved road. In concert with three bridges put in place over the Kunar River from 2006-2010, the general mood was one of developing prosperity and opportunities for business now that better lines of transport were made available.

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http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR270-Missed_Opportunities.pdf

⁴⁰ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Bi-Annual Report to Congress on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Department of Defense, December, 2012), p. 5. Available at:

http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf.

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⁴² Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11", (Washington D.C: Congressional Research Service, March 29, 2011), p. 3.

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⁵⁵ Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11* (London, England: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 66.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 55.

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¹⁰¹ Joseph J. Collins, "Stay the Course in Afghanistan: A Careful Transition—Not a Hasty Exit—Will Pay Long-Term Dividends", *Armed Forces Journal*, May, 2012, p. 25. This is the 15:20 proposal from Dr. Collins—15,000 troops and \$25 billion in aid support.

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¹⁰⁷ Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation/National Defense Research Institute, 2010), p. 122. Available at: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG965.html>

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¹⁰⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, pp. 113-136. Rashid devotes an entire chapter of this book to the failed reintegration and reconciliation efforts of the past 11 years and systematically corrects the historic record of attempts and articulates the mixed U.S. efforts as being impediments to negotiations with the Taliban.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 130.

¹¹¹ No author, "In Focus: Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program," (Kabul, Afghanistan: International Security Assistance Force). Available at: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/subordinate-commands/afghanistan-peace-and-reintegration-program/index.php>

¹¹² John R. Schmidt, *The Unraveling: Pakistan in the Age of Jihad*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), p. 202.

¹¹³ Ahmed Rashid. *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, pp. 191-192. An excellent rundown of Pakistan's political challenges in accepting a reconciliation effort to which they are not represented and a future government in Kabul that is unfriendly to Pakistan.

¹¹⁴ John R. Schmidt, *The Unraveling: Pakistan in the Age of Jihad*, pp.103, 202. Former deputy ambassador Schmidt describes the details behind the political backing of the Taliban in 1994 by Benazir Bhutto and the current stance of the Pakistan ISI support for Afghan Taliban while simultaneously prosecuting Pakistani Taliban.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 8-17.

¹¹⁶ No author, "Pakistan's Role Stressed: White House Says all Troops May Leave Afghanistan", *Dawn.com*, January 10, 2013. Available at: <http://dawn.com/2013/01/10/pakistans-role-stressed-white-house-says-all-troops-may-leave-afghanistan> Numerous reports of Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes describing Pakistan's role in the outcome stability in Afghanistan after 2014.

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¹¹⁹ Giles Dorronsoro, "Afghanistan: The Impossible Transition", (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June, 2011), p. 10. Available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2011/06/15/afghanistan-impossible-transition/1ij> Mr. Dorronsoro describes the paradox of aid infusion in areas across Afghanistan has shown no measurable positive difference or gains in security. His example of Kunar province actually shows the opposite is the case; the more development effort and aid seems to increase the probability of insecurity.

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¹²¹ Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Bi-Annual Report to Congress on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan". Washington, DC. December, 2012. P. 64. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf.

¹²² Barack Obama and Hamid Karzai, *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement Between the United States of America and The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. (Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 2012). Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspasignedtext.pdf>

¹²³ Dr. Joseph Collins, "Stay the Course in Afghanistan: A Careful Transition-Not a Hasty Exit-Will Pay Long-Term Dividends", *Armed Forces Journal*, May, 2012, p. 25.

¹²⁴ Martin Smith, "PBS Frontline: 'The Spy Who Quit: A Conversation with Amrullah Saleh'", January 17, 2011. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/2011/01/video-amrullah-saleh-spy-who-quit.html> Amrullah Saleh, former Director of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Afghanistan is a leading critic to those advocating a complete withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan. He is convinced a larger civil war will commence that fills the vacuum created, as experienced in the country in the early 1990's, that will leave over 2 million Afghans dead.

¹²⁵ Paul D. Miller, "It's Not Just Al-Qaeda: Stability in the Most Dangerous Region," *World Affairs Journal*, March/April 2012. Available at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/it%E2%80%99s-not-just-al-qaeda-stability-most-dangerous-region>

¹²⁶ David Case, "Pakistan nuclear terror: an interview with Stanford's Scott Sagan", *The Global Post*. June 13, 2011. Available at: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/pakistan/110613/pakistan-nuclear-terror-interview-scott-sagan?page=0,1>

¹²⁷ Personal vignette and observation. As a task force commander in Kunar Province, 2010-2011, I witnessed numerous instances of insurgents attacks that were more bold and sustained when weather impacted our abilities to bring in air support or Army aviation assets. Various insurgent groups would attack our positions during several operations when no air assets were nearby or they would attack and withdraw within 10 minutes, knowing that was the window the insurgents could count upon before coalition airpower could be brought to bear against them.

